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West Germany's former intelligence chief says recent spy defections have not seriously harmed the nation's overseas intelligence agency. He argues it was carefully designed to avoid damage from 'moles.'

Ex-official sees only minor harm to Bonn from spy flap

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Bonn

Eberhard Blum, the recently retired head of the West German Federal Intelligence Service, thinks the defection of West Germany's top spycatcher a month ago has not substantially hurt his old agency — or caused allies to be unwilling to share intelligence with Bonn.

In an interview the ex-president of the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND), the West German equivalent of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, Mr. Blum attributed this damage limitation to the strict compartmentalization between the BND intelligence service and the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Office for the Protection of the Constitution, or BFV) counterintelligence service. He spoke from a unique vantage point as both a four-decade veteran of the BND and a close collaborator of the CIA from his time as BND station chief in Washington in the late 1970s.

While he was discreet in his characterization of a fraternal service, Blum also made it clear that the BND has a better security record than the BFV and probably has better recruitment as well. It was in the BFV that Hans-Joachim Tiedge headed counterespionage operations before he defected to East Germany in late August, and it was Mr. Tiedge's department that should have flagged the half-dozen spies or suspects who have fled to East Germany or been arrested in West Germany in the past few weeks.

In the wide-ranging interview Blum also refuted charges of domestic political spying by the BND in its early years.

In expressing his confidence that the BND is "not tainted" by Tiedge's defection, Blum stressed, "We have been compartmentalized from the inception." The BND is responsible for its own internal security, he said, and does not rely on the BFV.

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The only overlapping of the two agencies comes in the exchange of finished intelligence in counterespionage, he continued, and indicated that since this information is not raw, it does not identify agents or sources.

"We may exchange or ask for data, but this is very restricted. . . . So I felt very comfortable about it [the limited impact of Tiedge's defection on BND operations], and I have heard [from current BND officials] that this is the case."

One specific instance of joint activity by the BND and BFV that Blum did cite involved the defection to Bonn in 1979 of "Werner Stiller," a pseudonymous officer who worked in the East German security department for spying on the West. In that case both the BND and the BFV debriefed Mr. Stiller for their separate purposes of intelligence and internal security, "but the operational side was ours."

Except in such unusual cases, Blum asserted, separation prevails. He acknowledged the frequent "temptation" to pool information and operations in the name of efficiency, but he said that as BND chief he always insisted on compartmentalization, even within the BND itself. "You cannot afford to sacrifice security considerations for efficiency [in any intelligence agency]. You have always to think about a potential mole."

Just such a Soviet mole, Heinz Felfe, the then head of BND counterintelligence responsible for the Soviet Union, was exposed in 1961 in the most serious spy scandal in the agency's history. "We got a hint from a defector, from our American friends. We had to look for him, and we found him," Blum related. After Mr. Felfe had been ferreted out, and the founder of the BND, Reinhard Gehlen, "felt very depressed, he got a call from the French chief [of intelligence, who] consoled him and said, 'You have found your spy. I am still looking for ours.' "

As a result of the Tiedge defection this fall and the earlier Walker spy case in the US Navy, Blum thought that "on the operational side," the CIA, FBI, and other US agencies would "watch even more than before the principle of compartmentalization." But that, he said, is just a question of "working habits" and would "absolutely" not affect the exchange of intelligence with the BND. He found speculation about the dangers in this area "highly overrated," and he pointed to the pragmatic horse-trading nature of bilateral cooperation between Western intelligence services.

"It's so long established and has proven to be so useful for both sides that I certainly don't see any change in the field of foreign intelligence cooperation."

Nor, obversely, does Blum think that BND operations have suffered from comparmentalization within West Germany. (Press reports appear occasionally about one intelligence agency's investigating what it suspects is a front, only to discover that it is indeed a front for another intelligence agency.) Blum praised the cooperation he had with Heribert Hellenbroich, the former head of the BFV who was promoted to succeed Blum at the BND in August, then was dismissed after the flight of his former employee Tiedge.

Other than the Felfe incident and — according to leaks from a still-secret report commissioned by the government in 1969 — the illegal collecting of dossiers on domestic political foes under first BND chief Gehlen, the BND has been relatively free of scandal. By contrast, the BFV has been plagued with spy and other scandals.

The first BFV chief, Otto John, vanished into East Berlin one summer evening in 1954 and returned to the West a year later, swearing that he had been kidnapped and had never revealed any se-

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crets — but he was still sentenced to four years in prison for high treason. His successor after a short interim, Hubert Schrübbers, had to resign at the end of almost 17 years in that position after his Nazi past was revealed. His successor Günther Nollau was toppled — as was Chancellor Willy Brandt — by the discovery of East German spy Günter Guillaume on the chancellor's staff. The next BFV chief, Richard Meier, had to resign after he was in a car accident in which a woman friend of his died.

When asked about the accusation of domestic spying leveled against Gehlen (Blum's original mentor in the BND), Blum dismissed it as "highly overrated." Some activity of the Gehlen Organization (the forerunner of the BND) took place in the early postwar years before the BND was actually founded, he noted, and in that period Gehlen "had to feel his way through the political landscape and sometimes jungle, which meant he had to know what leading people thought. This did not mean he made a systematic intelligence effort. But he had contacts. He had a lot of contacts in the internal field. . . . He, for instance, never believed that [prewar communist and postwar Social Democratic kingmaker Herbert] Wehner was a communist spy. On the contrary, he had a high regard for him."

The incident which did the most to give Gehlen a reputation for manipulating domestic politics, Blum noted, was probably his collection of information about contacts between the West German Social Democrats and the Italian Communist Party in Rome in the late 1960s, in the heyday of "Eurocommunism," when the Italian communists were distancing themselves from Moscow. Gehlen passed some of this information on to the West German Christian Democrats but not to the Social Democrats — although the two parties were at the time governing jointly in Bonn in a grand coalition.

Blum said that after Gehlen's retirement he himself inspected the relevant files and found them to be "a completely disorganized mixture" of such things as letters Gehlen received and sent, "but not an operational effort." Gehlen brought some unnecessary suspicion on himself, Blum thought, by not letting himself be photographed and otherwise cultivating an aura of secrecy.

On the broader question of the BND's apparently greater success in warding off moles (in comparison with the BFV), Blum attributed this better record to the general principle the agency has followed since the early 1950s of not employing East German émigrés in the BND home office in Pullach near Munich. In that period East Germany started a comprehensive program of planting long-term agents in West Germany.

"We have been very strict" on that principle, Blum emphasized. Franz Roski, for example, a former section chief in the West German Border Protection Service who has just been convicted as an East German agent, "tried to get into the BND, but . . . we just did not take him because of our objective standards."

Blum also thought the security record of the BND was better than that of the BFV because "straight intelligence work is probably less frustrating. [The BND's work is] really in the field of foreign security, [external] security. Intelligence service is in the same boat with foreign service and defense." What Blum was referring to obliquely was the distaste that many West Germans have, given the history of the Nazi secret police, for the BFV's demoralizing job of domestic spying. Inside West Germany the BFV infiltrates not only East German espionage networks but also terrorist, right and left extremist, and allegedly also antinuclear groups inside West Germany. This revulsion makes it even more difficult for the BFV than for the BND to recruit elite newcomers, even for a strictly counterespionage role.